PITTA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 11 Number 10 December 2014

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 14th December 2014: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Spanning an area of over 40 km², the Narsapur Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. Brown Fish Owl, Indian Pitta, White-bellied Drongo etc are some of the interesting sightings during past visits. Narsapur Lake also has the potential of throwing up some surprises. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

Trip Report – Narepally Reserve Forest, 23rd November 2014

Ranjan Matthew

Photo: Hemant Kumar

Waking up at 5:00AM to go birding with the BSAP was something I hadn't done in almost 14 years, but interestingly enough, the feelings of anticipation and excitement were still strong. Binocs, check. Krys Field Guide, check. Water, check. Pen and notepad, check. And so - off I went.

Part of the group was to meet at Punjagutta cross roads before setting off towards Uppal crossroads, where they would meet up with the remainder of the group. Mr. Lawrence and crew served as our homing signal just off the Uppal crossroads, and we reached the spot at 6:30AM. The rest of the members flocked in a cool 45 minutes later, Hyderabadi style. The sun was quite high by the time our 32-strong group reached the reserve forest. The drive to the reserve forest was quick, just under 30 minutes from Uppal.

The large forest department billboard at the entrance to the park boasted a large Indian Peafowl, and it read "Wake up to the call of nature. Care, contribute, conserve, for a better tomorrow."

With these encouraging messages from our beloved State Forest Department, we were quickly introduced to one of the forest officials, who had agreed to go along with us on the walk. The first thing I noticed about the forest was that it shared several features with KBR Park, with the extremely dry and dusty paths winding through dry green forest vegetation, mostly dense scrub jungle.

Black Drongo (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Right off the bat, the trees on the left sported several little birds. We spotted assorted flowerpeckers, sunbirds, and prinias all around. Members noted Pale-billed Flowerpeckers, Ashy Prinias, and Common Tailorbirds with their trademark "*tew tew tew*" singing. Quick flashes of bright yellow made us swing our lenses around towards several pairs of Purple-rumped sunbirds actively feeding and zipping around. Also seen in plenty were Red-vented Bulbuls and Black Drongos.

The group soon split up naturally into sub-groups according to walking speed etc. Moving along, we spotted a Common Mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsii)* walking gracefully through the thick bush. A distinctively-coloured Greater Coucal added some spice to the fray. The vegetation in this park is predominantly dry shrubs and bushes, with rather dense undergrowth and a variety of trees. The above-mentioned bird species clearly dominated the area, and we continued to see them in good numbers even an hour into the walk. A solitary Brown Shrike got our attention for a while, and the field guides were out until it was identified after a better look through Sathvik's gigantic zoom lens. Another notable spotting in the thick of some nearby trees was a Golden Oriole, it's dashing yellow cheering everyone up.

Brown Shrike (Photo: Sathvik Reddy Nimma)

Seen among the trees, and identified after much debate, was a Plain Prinia, which delightfully jumped in and out of the dense bushes, giving us quite a challenge.

As the sun grew brighter and brighter, the brave BSAPians trudged on through the winding pathways, only stopping momentarily to shake our heads disapprovingly at some carelessly thrown plastic and litter. While this did give some cause for concern and emphasized the need for better education regarding littering and pollution in the country, the walk was mostly pleasant, and the park was mostly clean.

As the groups became sub-groups, and sub-groups became threesomes and foursomes, the day went on through the Narepally Reserve Forest. The noise of the highway traffic more or less died out within the depths of the park, giving the pleasant sensation of being far away from the city.

Small Minivet (female) (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

At one point, while walking through the dusty forest trail, Sharada and I heard a sudden grunt, followed by a short, stout, dark-brown animal hurtling across the path around the bend. We were later informed that there were plenty of wild boars in the area. Mr. Krishnam Raju, a wildlife enthusiast and friend who had accompanied us on the trip, informed us that they are highly territorial and can be very aggressive.

"You know what to do if they come charging towards you?" he asked me. "No," I replied, trying not to visualize myself being charged at by a wild boar. "Just climb up the nearest rock or tree, and they won't do anything," came the prompt response. Thereafter, my peripheral vision constantly kept track of nearby easily-climbable trees and small rocks that I could scurry up, in case I was attacked by a wild boar. Thankfully, though, this did not happen.

As we walked through the forest, also noted were several energetic and beautiful Green Bee-eaters flip-flopping, looping around, and generally being their usual delightfully acrobatic selves. Members also confirmed sightings of Shikra, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Common Kestrel, Asian Koel and a Eurasian Thick-knee. Hemant spotted a male Asian Paradise-flycatcher along the trail, while Sathvik noted a Red-breasted Flycatcher with its distinctive call and tail flick (which fueled a long drawn debate amongst members for a while to come), and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

Common Kestrel with lizard kill (Photo: Hemant Kumar)

A couple of members up ahead noticed a warbler which seemed significantly green in colour, with distinct greenish supercilium and yellow-orange lower mandible. We were not able to identify it at that time, but it was later identified as Tickell's Leaf Warbler, quite a rarity for the region.

Tickell's Leaf Warbler (Photo: Sathvik Reddy Nimma)

The sun was high in the sky by now, and the members were reaching into their backpacks frequently for water or a quick snack. By 11:00AM, we were all quite spent and somehow reached the end of the walk back to the gate. Tea was brought to the by-now-famished BSAP members who proceeded to tuck into their packed breakfasts.

The park offers employment and natural resources to a large number of people from the nearby villages. It seems to be quite well-maintained – they even have bicycles, in great condition, available on hire, for riding through the forest which has an outer path nearly 5 km long. We noted the growing number of families visiting the park as time progressed, indicating that this was a popular Sunday picnic destination among local families.

Once refueled, some members were recharged enough to purchase some classic BSAP T-shirts (get yours today!), and everyone huddled together for a lovely group photograph to sign off the day's proceedings.

We got to see almost 40 species of birds and several butterflies, and were quite satisfied with the outing to the never-before-explored Narepally Reserve Forest.

The full list of birds seen is given below:

	Common Name	Scientific Name		Common Name	Scientific Name
	At Boud Uppal Lake		13	Oriental Magpie Robin	Copsychus saularis
1	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus	14	Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis
2	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	15	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Ficedula parva
3	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	16	Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata
4	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii	17	Booted Warbler	Hippolais caligata
5	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis	18	Black Kite	Milvus migrans
6	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	19	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Cyornis tickelliae
7	Common Coot	Fulica atra	20	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus
8	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	21	Greenish Warbler	Phylloscopus trochiloides
9	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	22	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	Coracina melanoptera
10	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	23	Jungle Prinia	Prinia sylvatica
11	Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio	24	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopacea
			25	Eurasian Thick-knee	Burhinus oedicnemus
	At Narepally Reserve Forest		26	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Nectarinia zeylonica
1	Greater Coucal	Centropus sinesis	27	Long-tailed Shrike	Lanius schach
2	Black Drongo	Dicrurus macrocercus	28	Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus
3	Indian Robin	Saxicoloides fulicata	29	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
4	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer	30	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus
5	Shikra	Accipiter badius	31	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus malabaricus
6	Ashy Prinia	Prinia socialis	32	House Crow	Corvus splendens
7	Purple Sunbird	Nectarinia asiatica	33	Coppersmith Barbet	Megalaima heamacephala
8	Jungle Crow	Corvus macrorhynchos	34	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	Terpsiphone paradisi
9	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	35	Blue-faced Malkoha	Phaneicophaeus viridirostris
10	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos	36	Tickell's Leaf Warbler	Phylloscopus affinis
11	Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus	37	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus
12	Large Grey Babbler	Turdoides malcolmi	38	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius

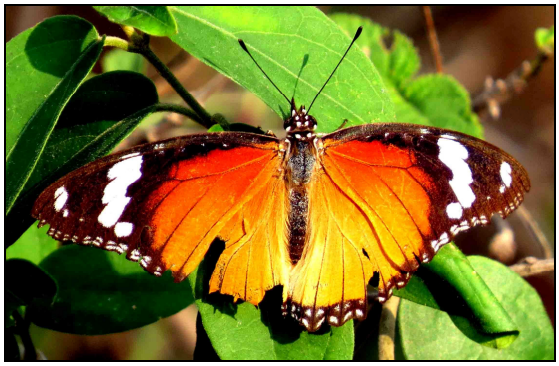
FRAGILE & INCREDIBLE BEAUTIES

The Butterflies of Narepally Reserve Forest, 23rd November 2014

Surekha Aitabathula

Crimson Rose (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Trust the unreasonable human to slight the ugly and extol the beautiful. This is the reason why our brains resist the fact that the gorgeous butterfly is an insect. "Insect??" We ask in horror. Yes! This stunningly beautiful creature with ultra-delicate membranous wings and the most brilliant colours is an insect that can, all by itself, beautify even the largest garden.



Striped Tiger (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

A vast country with wide contrasts in physical features and contrasting climate zones, from scorching sun-baked deserts to the wettest places on earth and the coldest alpine regions, India possesses among the richest and most varied butterfly fauna in the world.

Butterflies occur throughout the world except for the polar regions. They have been around for at least 50 million years and probably first evolved some 150 million years ago.

Each wing of the butterfly is made of two closely-pressed thin membranes, supported by a network of veins running between them. The membranes are covered with a number of multiform and multicolored scales, which determine the coloration of the wings.

Small Grass Yellow (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

The complete metamorphosis of a butterfly from egg to caterpillar to pupa and adult is an astounding natural phenomenon. The fertilised egg takes from three days to one week to hatch. The caterpillar emerges by biting through the eggshell - its first food. Thereafter it feeds on its food plant. The caterpillar can demolish every edible leaf, bud, flower and shoot that comes its way.

You would be lucky if you get to see the emergence of the butterfly from its pupa. A night before emergence, the pupal case becomes transparent, allowing the colours of the butterfly wings to be seen. By morning the colors darken and the pupal case splits open at the head. Waving legs are thrust out and the insect hauls itself clear of the case. It may crawl a few inches to the underside of the stem or lead to which it is anchored.

At this point the wings are crumpled and wet and the abdomen is distended. The wings unfurl and expand rapidly to normal size as haemolymph (insect blood) from the abdomen is pumped into the hollow wing veins. The soft wings gradually become stronger after exposure to the air. After resting for half an hour or so, the newly-emerged butterfly starts flapping its wings a few times to get the feel of them, and then takes off.

Common Pierrot (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

Most butterflies fly during the day as they prefer the warmth of the sun to feed and bask. They have slender antennae with clubbed tips. The butterfly consumes only liquids like nectar juices from overripe fruits, oozing plant sap, liquid mud, animal dung, body juices of dead crabs and other animals. A long slender tube called 'proboscis' helps in sucking liquids. The proboscis remains neatly coiled under the head when not in use.

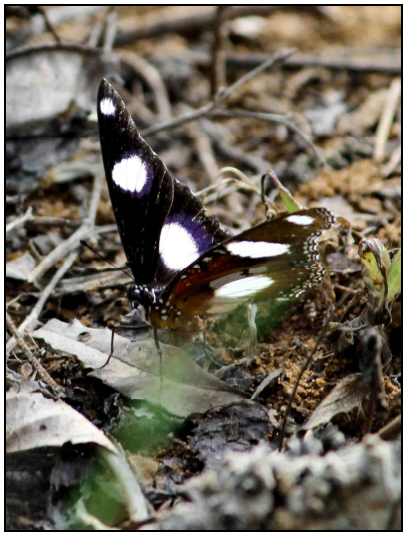
Mud-puddling undertaken by butterflies is an interesting activity. At times a small group of up to several hundred butterflies can be seen in damp sand or mud banks. Mud-puddling males often spend a long time on these damp patches, where they suck salts along with water. Barring a few exceptions, most butterflies mud-puddle.

Orange Tip (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Unlike warm-blooded animals, butterflies do not have a constant body temperature. Their body temperature depends on the surrounding ambient temperature. A lower temperature slows down their physiological processes. Butterflies need to regulate their temperature and therefore may bask in the sunlight, or withdraw under a leaf to lower their temperature. Most butterflies just spread their wings flat and align themselves for maximum exposure to sunlight.

Lemon Pansy (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Butterflies are short-lived insects, hence every naturalist worth his salt must dissuade those unthinking folk who catch butterflies for entertainment. All they would do is end up killing this most delicate creature, with intricate wing pattern and iridescence that can be voted the most beautiful in any given environs. Butterflies are flagship species for conservation in general, and for invertebrates in particular. They are extremely valuable indicators of the health of the environment.



Danaid Eggfly (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

When I was writing this trip report, a journalist friend asked me "Butterfly conservation? How and why do butterflies matter?" Totally aghast at the sheer callousness of the question, I said, "Just Google images of Blue Tiger, Common Red Apollo, Bhutan Glory, Glassy Blue Bottle, Crimson Tip, Dark Wanderer, Popinjay, Blue Mormon, Blue Pansy, Lime Butterfly, Malabar Banded Peacock, Golden Birdwing and Constable and compare them to a *homo sapiens* and tell me who, despite having a short life span, beautifies the landscape, and who, with a 70-year lifespan, recklessly plunders it."

Crimson Tip (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

(Note: The writer acknowledges the use of reference book by name "The Book of Indian Butterflies" by Isaac Kehimkar)

The full list of species seen at Narepally is given below:

S. No.	Common Name	Family	S. No.	Common Name	Family
1	Baronet	**Nymphalidae** (Brush-footed Butterflies)	13	Common Grass Yellow	**Pieridae** (Whites and Yellows)
2	Common Castor		14	Common Jezebel	
3	Common Crow		15	Common Wanderer	
4	Common Evening Brown		16	Crimson Tip	
5	Danaid Eggfly		17	Mottled Emigrant	
6	Lemon Pansy		18	Psyche	
7	Plain Tiger		19	Small Orange Tip	
8	Striped Tiger		20	Common Pierrot	**Lycaenidae** (Blues)
9	Tawny Coster		21	(Pale/Dark) Grass Blue	
10	Common Bluebottle	**Papilionidae** (Swallowtails)			
11	Common Mormon				
12	Crimson Rose				

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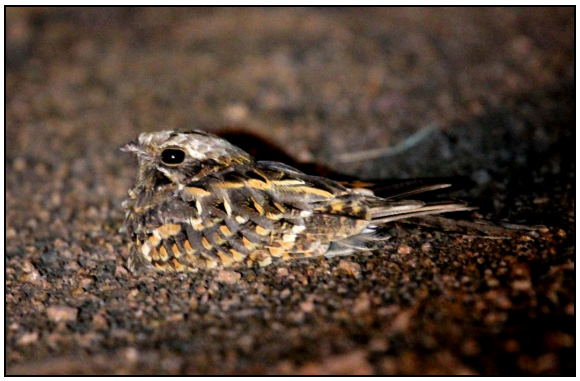
Report – Visit to Rollapadu, September 2014

Text and photos: Anand Kalinadhabhatla

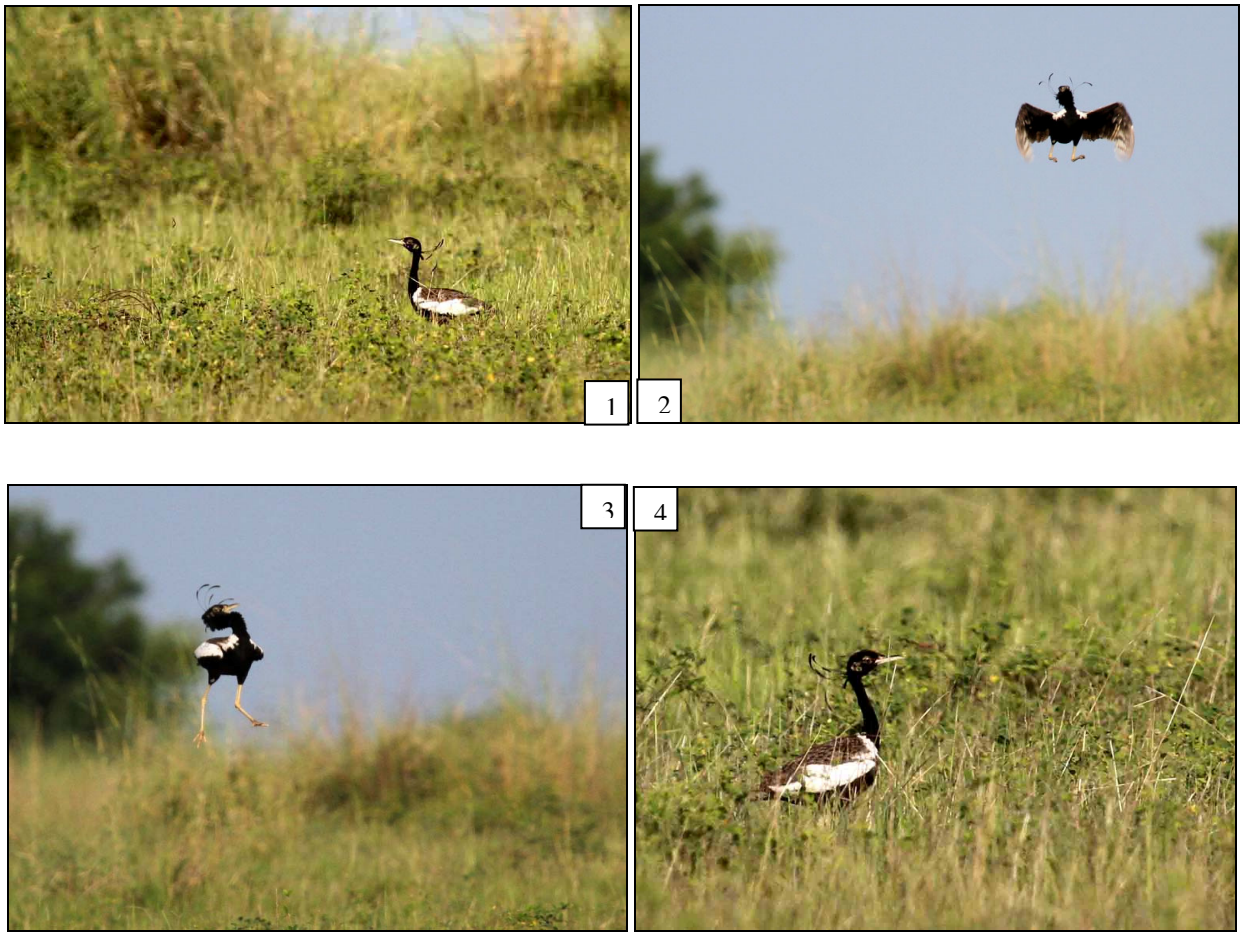
Sridevi, Karthik and I made a visit to Rollapadu in September. Some of the interesting sightings were Rufous-fronted Prinia, Lesser Florican, Red-necked Falcon and Common Babbler, which are rare sightings for the region.



Indian Nightjar

Red-necked Falcon

The highlight of the trip was the famous courtship display of the Lesser Florican, through which a male was trying to attract a female (whom we unfortunately could not see). Floricans seem to prefer tall grass. The simultaneous jump-and-call breeding display routine by the male bird would usually occur in a small patch of land. In the three days of our observation, we found that the male bird was always within a small patch (150mx100m approximately) while displaying.



Courtship display of the Lesser Florican

Some other sightings during the trip:

Black Buck Male (L) and Female (R)

Indian Fox (L) and Eurasian Collared Dove (R)

Southern Grey Shrike

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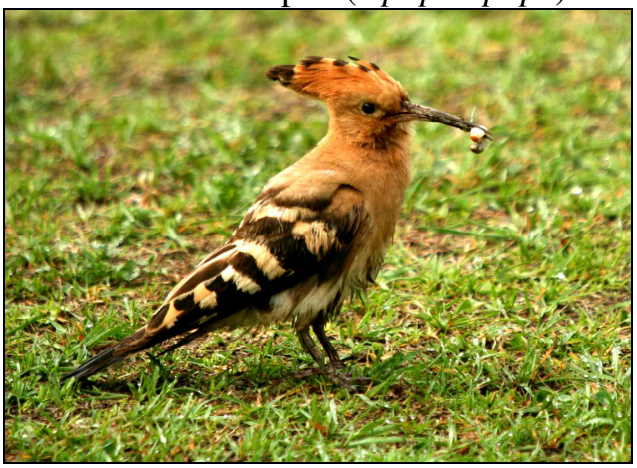
Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)



Common Hoopoe (Manali, 19-05-2010)

Order: Bucerotiformes
Family: Upupidae
Genus: *Upupa*
Species: *U. epops*
Size: 25-32 cm

Description &distribution: The Common Hoopoe is a beautiful, colourful bird found across most parts of Africa, Europe and Asia. It is unmistakable, with a prominent black-tipped rufous crest or 'crown'; this rufous colour also extends across the head, chest and upper back. The Hoopoe may spread its crest wide during times of alarm or excitement, and during mating or aggression displays. It has a long, thin, tapering bill, which is black in colour with a fawn base. The bill is unique due to the strengthened musculature of the head, which allows the bill to be opened even while probing inside the soil. The wings have alternate broad black-and-white stripes, and the tail is black.

Nine sub-species are recognised – the nominate race *U. e. epops*, seen in north-west Africa, Canary Islands, and from Europe across south & central Russia, north-west China, and southwards to north-western India; four sub-species - *U. e. major, U. e. senegalensis, U. e. waibeli* and *U. e. africana* - seen in different parts of Africa; *U. e. marginata* of Madagascar, *U. e. saturata* of Japan, south China and Tibet; *U. e. ceylonensis* of the Indian sub-continent; and *U. e. longirostris* of south-east Asia. They differ mainly in size and depth of colour in the plumage. Two further sub-species, *U. e. minor* in South Africa and *U. e. orientalis* in north-western India, have been proposed. Its usual three-note call, *oop-oop-oop*, has given rise to its scientific name as well as the common name; however, it does emit two- or four-note calls. Besides, it may also utter rasping croaks (when alarmed), hisses, a wheezy note (especially by the female, during courtship), a rough *charrr*, and a *tiiii* (the begging call of the nestlings).

The Common Hoopoe is seen across a wide range of habitats, including light forest (except the Madagascar sub-species which also uses dense forest), grasslands, meadows, groves, orchards, vineyards, gardens and parks. It has had a long relationship with humans, even finding mention in the Bible, Quran and various historical texts from ancient Egypt, Greece, China and elsewhere.

Behaviour: It is a solitary forager, and is usually seen looking for food on the ground, though it does occasionally feed in the air; for instance, when there are swarms of insects flying around. On the ground, it tends to walk along, stopping now and then to probe the gaps and cracks for insect larvae, pupae or mole crickets, which it will pull out with its long bill or, sometimes, dig out with its feet. It may also forage under leaves, stones, or tree bark, which it turns over with its strong beak. Other components of the diet include locusts, beetles, cicadas, ant lions, bugs, ants, earwigs, maggots, grasshoppers, spiders, centipedes, snails, and even frogs, lizards and small snakes. Larger prey may be consumed after beating against the ground or a rock, to kill it and remove indigestible parts like legs or wings. During mating, it is highly territorial and can behave aggressively towards rivals; the birds use their bills to attack each other, causing injuries and sometimes even blinding the other bird. Pair bonds are monogamous, but seem to last only for one season.

Nesting: The Common Hoopoe breeds generally from February to May, with some regional variations. The nest is usually a crevice or hole in a cliff, wall, or tree, with a narrow entrance. It may be lined with odd scraps or even unlined. The milky-blue eggs soon become discoloured in the dirty nest. Birds in the northern hemisphere and / or at higher altitudes lay larger clutches. Typical clutch size may vary from four in the tropics to 12 in central and northern Europe and Asia.

Local name: The Common Hoopoe is known by very evocative vernacular names in most languages - *'konda pitta'* or *'kireetam pitta'* in Telugu, '*chaval kuruvi'* in Tamil, *'chandramukuta'* or *'hoopo'* in Kannada, and *'uppooppan'* (very close to the scientific name) in Malayalam. It is also known as *'hudhud'* in Hindi, Kashmiri, Gujarati and Marathi. In Baluchistan, it is known as *'murgh-i-suleiman'*.

Bird Humour

(From Times of India, 02-10-2013)

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WE WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS
A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2015!

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